

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 TUNIS 00954 141328Z

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TAGS: PFOR OVIP TS

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA'S VISIT TO U.S.

REF: TUNIS 722; TUNIS 834; STATE 22096

1. PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA'S DOCTORS HAVE NOW DECIDED ONCE AND FOR ALL THAT HE SHOULD NOT TRAVEL ANYWHERE BEYOND TWO-HOUR TIME DIFFERENCE. ACCORDINGLY, THE DOCTORS WILL NOT RPT NOT PERMIT HIM TO ACCEPT PRESIDENT FORD'S INVITATION TO VISIT U.S. ON MAY 1.

2. FOREGOING WAS COMMUNICATED TO ME UNOFFICIALLY BY HABIB BOURGUIBA, JR. FEBRUARY 13 AND OFFICIALLY TODAY, FEB 14, BY FONMIN CHATTI. BIBI, JR. SAID THAT HIS FATHER IS VERY UNHAPPY WITH THIS DECISION SINCE HE HAS BEEN COUNTING SO MUCH ON THIS VISIT. BUT, CONTINUED BIBI, JR., PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA REALIZES THAT HE MUST ACCEPT DOCTORS' VERDICT. ACCORDING TO BOTH FONMIN AND BIBI, JR., PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA'S RECENT SOJOURN IN SWISS MOUNTAINS HAS UNDERSCORED IMPORTANCE THAT PRESIDENT ADHERE SCRUPULOUSLY TO "CADENCE" OF HIS REGIME. THIS MEANS EATING AND SLEEPING AT PRECISE TUNISIAN HOURS, WHICH BECOMES IMPOSSIBLE BEYOND TWO-HOUR TIME DIFFERENCE. CHATTI TOLD ME THAT OTHERWISE PRESIDENT IS IN GOOD HEALTH.

3. PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA HAS ASKED HIS SON TO CARRY
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PERSONAL MESSAGE TO WASHINGTON EXPLAINING REASON FOR

PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA'S INABILITY TO ACCEPT INVITATION (WORD "WASHINGTON" WAS USED BY CHATTI; BIBI, JR. SAID HIS FATHER WANTED HIM TO DELIVER MESSAGE PERSONALLY TO PRESIDENT FORD). PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA WANTS TO BE ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN THAT USG DOES NOT RPT NOT IN ANY WAY MISCONSTRUE THIS TUNISIAN DECISION.

4. TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT HOPES THAT PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA CAN BE INVITED TO U.S. INSTEAD. CHATTI SAID THAT NOUIRA VISIT WOULD BE PRODUCTIVE NOT ONLY IN MAINTAINING DIALOGUE AND HIGH-LEVEL CONTACTS, BUT IN DEMONSTRATING TO THE TUNISIAN PUBLIC CONTINUED IMPORTANCE WHICH GOT ATTACHES TO ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH USG.

5. I TOLD CHATTI AND BIBI, JR. THAT WHILE I REGRETTED INABILITY OF PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA TO ACCEPT PRESIDENT FORD'S INVITATION, I FULLY UNDERSTOOD REASON. OBVIOUSLY. PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA'S HEALTH IS OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE AND SHOULD NOT BE RISKED. I SAID THAT I KNEW MY GOVERNMENT SHARED THIS VIEW AND THAT THERE WOULD BE NO PROBLEM OF ANY POSSIBLE MISUNDERSTANDING. I INDICATED I WOULD PASS TO WASHINGTON PROPOSAL THAT PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA VISIT WASHINGTON. I CAUTIONED THAT ANY NOUIRA VISIT WOULD, OF COURSE, BE MORE LOW KEY. CHATTI SAID HE UNDERSTOOD THIS. HE PROPOSED SAME EARLY MAY TIME FRAME, NOTING THAT PRIME MINISTER SHOULD BE BACK IN TUNISIA BY MAY 13, WHEN BOURGUIBA GOES TO YUGOSLAVIA.

6. COMMENT:

A. SUGGESTION THAT PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA VISIT U.S. IN PLACE OF PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA IS AN EXCELLENT ONE. DEPARTMENT WILL RECALL THAT SOME THREE YEARS AGO, WHEN BOURGUIBA WAS SERIOUSLY ILL, A VISIT TO U.S. BY NOUIRA WAS BEING CONSIDERED. SUGGEST THAT NOUIRA BE INVITED AT ABOUT SAME TIME PLANNED FOR BOURGIBA VISIT, I.E., THE FIRST WEEK IN MAY, AND THAT (AS DEPT. HAS PROPOSED) WE PLAN TO SCHEDULE FIRST JOINT

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COMMISSION MEETING AT THAT TIME.

B. REQUEST (1) INDICATION AS TO WHEN IT WOULD BE CONVENIENT FOR BIBI, JR. TO POP INTO WASHINGTON CARRYING HIS FATHER'S PERSONAL MESSAGE; AND (2) GUIDANCE AS TO WHAT I SHOULD TELL BIBI, JR. RE POSSIBILITY OF HIS SEEING PRESIDENT FORD. OBVIOUSLY, LATTER WOULD BE DESIRABLE IF AT ALL POSSIBLE.

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